

Relationship between Employees Engagement and Project Performance

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Abstract: Employee engagement refers to the emotional connection and commitment employees have towards their work and the organization. It has been widely acknowledged that there is a positive relationship between employee engagement and productivity. When employees are engaged, they tend to be more motivated, satisfied, and proactive in their roles, leading to improved productivity levels.

Human resource management plays a crucial role in fostering employee engagement within organizations. HR departments are responsible for providing the necessary support, resources, and work environment that contribute to higher engagement levels. They implement strategies such as effective communication, recognition and rewards programs, training and development opportunities, and promoting work-life balance to enhance employee engagement.

In a functional organization, different departments or units are divided based on specific functions or tasks. This structure can impact employee engagement differently depending on how effectively the HR management approach is integrated. It is essential to ensure that HR strategies and practices are aligned with the specific needs and goals of each functional unit. This can be achieved through customized training programs, tailored employee engagement initiatives, and regular feedback mechanisms.

Saudi Aramco, provides a noteworthy example of best practices in employee engagement. Saudi Aramco has implemented various strategies to enhance employee engagement and productivity. They have established open communication channels, encouraging employees to share ideas, concerns, and feedback. Regular employee surveys are conducted to assess engagement levels and measure the effectiveness of HR initiatives. Saudi Aramco also offers flexible work arrangements, recognizes and rewards exceptional performance, and invests in training and development opportunities for personal growth.

By focusing on employee engagement, Saudi Aramco has created a positive work environment that fosters creativity, collaboration, and high-performance culture. As a result, employees feel valued, motivated, and committed, leading to increased productivity levels and overall organizational success. These best practices can serve as a blueprint for other organizations aiming to improve employee engagement and productivity.

Keywords: Engagement, Employees, Project, Performance, Management, HR.

1. INTRODUCTION

Projects are initiated, funded and sponsored to realize expected benefits and values to stakeholders and organizations. Benefits can be classified as financial, compliance to new regulations, capturing new opportunities, facilities upgrade and etc. It is the project manager and the project team's main role to successfully complete the project meeting the objectives within the main project constraints identified by PMI that are time, cost, resources, quality, risks and customer satisfaction. It is the project manager and team responsibility to identify success factors to maximize benefits and minimize risk to avoid project failure.

Human resource is not only the most important resource in any organization, but also is considered as one of the main factors that determine organizations' business sustainability and success. Major part of any company's investments and expenditures is allocated for Human resources and associated expenses. This is to ensure that their employees are competent, skillful and trained human resources, organizations to be able to achieve set goals. In very well-established organizations, there are departments whose main role is about Human Resource Management. This is a very clear sign of the important sign of Human Resources contribution organization success. This is also considered in projectized organization for the success of projects.

In the project management field, human resources processes are introduced by Project Management Institute guiding Project organization for effective management and utilization of resources. This all to ensure to have acceptable project performance to meet and exceed stakeholders' expectations. One of the main issues to be carefully considered by managers in all type of organizations is employees' engagement to ensure their contribution to organizations success. Employees engagement is a concept related to employees' interest and willing to contribute to organization business and success.

In this paper, I will discuss the relationship between employee's engagement and project performance.

2. PROJECT PERFORMANCE

The Standard for project management and a guide to the Project Management Body Of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide) introduced and determined project management principles, knowledge area, processes and practices to be applied while executing project to gain the intended benefits within the predetermined constrains (time, cost, resources, quality, risks and customer satisfaction). It is the project manager and teams' duty to apply practices achieving best project performance to maximize realizing the benefits for customers and stakeholders in line with set strategic goals and objectives.

PMBOK Guide defined project performance domain as a "Group of related activities that are critical for effective delivery of project outcome" (1) and identified eight project performance domains that are stakeholders, team, development approach and life cycle, planning, project work, delivery, measurement and uncertainty. These domains are interrelated and the project teams operate them as integrated system. Projectized organizations can use these performance domains as bases to measure, monitor and control their projects and may develop additional tools for the aforementioned objectives pursuing operation excellence. Project performance, outcomes and realizing benefits depend on the project teams' effectiveness when applying knowledge, processes, skills, tools and techniques while delivering project. Monitoring and controlling the performance is a continuous process throughout the project life cycles from the initiation stage till project delivery and closeout. Project performance is a very important factor for the continuity of the project execution to effectively deliver the project outcomes and meeting or exceeding stakeholders' expectation and satisfaction. Projects will be stopped uncompleted in case cost is greater the calculated values.

While executing and delivering projects, we believe that measuring progress is one of the most critical activities project management teams perform. This is because it should be performed effectively linked to organizations' strategic goals and intended benefits. Reading the project management researches, researchers and project management professionals did not totally agree on one set of tools and means for project performance. However, Key Performance indicators are the common tools to monitor and control project performance.

Saudi Aramco is the world's largest integrated energy and chemicals company, creating value across the hydrocarbon chain, and delivering societal and economic benefits to people and communities around the globe who rely on the vital energy Aramco supplies. Saudi Aramco has over 50 projectized organizations executing projects with operational excellence to maximize the intended benefits.

According to PMBOK Guide, project performance domains are guided by principles of project management, which provides guidance for people's behavior involved or related when executing project.

2.1 KPIs

Performance indicators are key measures that are used to track the progress and success of a project. There're several performance indicators that project managers can use depending on the nature of project. Some of the common performance indicators include timeline, cost and quality. By establishing metrics to evaluate elements like team spirit, job happiness, and customer gratitude, businesses may lay the groundwork for developing people focused KPIs. Measuring methods might consist of anything from careful observation to formal interviews to casual chats to questionnaires and surveys. To evaluate the health of stakeholder relationships and track progress, structured interviews can be done at various stages of a project's lifecycle.

3. HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Human resource management plays a significant role in determining project performance. Effective management of human resources can help to ensure that the right people are in the right positions at the right time, with the necessary skills and experience to complete tasks effectively. This, in turn, can contribute to the successful completion of the project, as well as improved productivity, employee satisfaction, and reduced turnover rates. “Also, Armstrong (2006) defined Human Resource Management (HRM) as a strategic and coherent approach to the management of an organization’s most valued assets – the people working there who individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of its objectives (2).”

3.1 HRM History

HRM principle evolved throughout the history several times due to several reasons such as social and economic activities. “HRM is a product of the human relations movement of the early 20th century, when researchers began documenting ways of creating business value through the strategic management of the workforce. The function was initially dominated by transactional work, such as payroll and benefits administration, but due to globalization, company consolidation, technological advancement, and further research, HR now focuses on strategic initiatives like mergers and acquisitions, talent management, succession planning, industrial and labor relations, ethical considerations, diversity and inclusion. These, among other initiatives contribute to the understanding of Human Resource Management as a contemporary issue owing to their sustained evolutionary nature (3).” Nowadays, Human Resource Management is very mature concepts and processes in organizations and industries that needs to be managed effectively for the success and sustainability of business. Human resource management is also one of important knowledge areas in Project management business and guidelines.

3.2 Importance of HRM in projects

Management of human resources can help to ensure that the right people are in the right positions at the right time, with the necessary skills and experience to complete tasks effectively. This, in turn, can contribute to the successful completion of the project, as well as improved productivity, employee satisfaction, and reduced turnover rates. Effective human resource management involves various aspects, such as recruitment and selection, training and development, performance evaluation and management, and employee motivation and retention. It also involves creating a positive work environment that encourages teamwork, communication, and collaboration. When properly managed, human resources can serve as a source of competitive advantage for companies.

However, if human resource management is ineffective, it can have a negative impact on project performance. Poorly skilled, untrained, and unmotivated employees can cause delays, increase costs, and reduce quality. In addition, high employee turnover rates can lead to disrupted work and the loss of valuable skills and knowledge.

4. PROJECTIZED VS. FUNCTIONAL ORGANIZATION

A projectized organization is a type of organizational structure that is focused on completing projects rather than ongoing operations. In a projectized organization, employees are organized into project teams that work on a specific project from start to finish where mobilization and demobilization take place based on the projects needs and plan. The project team is the most important asset in any organization responsible for delivering a specific product, service, or result that meets the project objectives. The projectized organization focus on completing projects that meet specific objective that are directly or indirectly linked to the organization strategic objective.

Overall, a projectized organization is geared towards completing projects that meet specific objectives within a set timeline. The organization's structure is flexible to respond to changes and project needs to be executed within a set of constrains.

Comparing between Functional and Projectized Organization

Focal Points	Functional	Projectized
Purpose	Focused on ongoing operations	Focused on completing projects
Employees	Employees within each department have specialized roles and expertise, allowing them to focus on specific tasks	Teams are created specifically for the project and work on the project until it’s completed
Employees Rotational	Working in one organization	Continuous movement from one project to another
Duration	The duration is not specified	Specific time
Organization’s Structure	Inelastic	Flexible to respond to changes

4.1 Saudi Aramco Projectized Organization

In projectized organizational structure, a project team is created to work on a specific project, and this team has complete autonomy and authority to make all project-related decisions. This focus is on achieving the project within specific constraints, such as the timeline, budget, and scope.

In Saudi Aramco, projectized organizational structure is adopted for large-scale projects that require significant resources and coordination across several functional areas such as engineering, finance, and operations. Saudi Aramco's project teams may consist of subject matter experts who operate on a full-time basis until the completion of the project. Projectized organizational structure are well suited to large capital expenditure projects, such as building new refineries, petrochemical complexes, and large-scale energy facilities.

Although Saudi Aramco primary approach is functional, the company has a history of adopting successfully history of completing complex mega projects. The project management practices implemented in Aramco project department are improving project execution. One of the concepts that have been applied in Saudi Aramco is the Integrated Project Teams (IPT). This requires projectized teams to acquire personnel and subject matter experts from several functional departments to be part of the IPT. IPT approaches embody the best of both worlds, and the case of Saudi Aramco, this has proven to be an effective way of managing large-scale projects.

5. EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Reading on related subjects and literatures, we noticed that researchers did not agree on one common definition for Employee engagement making this subject very interesting to be discussed. In this section, we will quote some of the famous definition of this terminology. For example, Robinson et al. (2004) defined Employee Engagement as "a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its value". We understand the employee engagement as the willingness and capacity of employees to contribute to the success of their organization, primarily through making discretionary efforts on a consistent basis. Employee engagement can also be thought of as a pleasant mental, emotional, and behavioral state at the workplace that is geared toward the achievement of organizational goals.



Employee engagement is increasingly recognized as one of the HRM area of concerns and a key factor in the growth and success of businesses. It is essential to the achievement of great performance because of its connection to the organization's strategy, purpose, and meaning. It's not enough to simply be kind to employees; employee engagement must be business focused. Numerous studies illustrate how successful companies incorporate employee engagement initiatives into their operations; therefore, keeping people interested and involved is a top priority for Saudi Aramco, which is why the business is investing time and energy into developing new strategies to do so.

There're three levels of employees' engagement:

- Engaged

Engaged employees see the meaning and purpose of their work, the direction of the company and their part in it. They behave in a way that shows their commitment and pride in working for the organization, they're proactive and pleased to be there. Typical behaviors include a willingness to help others, making suggestions, taking part, being confident and trying out new ideas.

- Not- Engaged

An employee is considered disengaged when they are seen to be participating in their work but do not bring the same level of enthusiasm and passion toward achieving the organization's overall mission.

- Disengaged

“Disengaged employees, on the other hand, show a lackadaisical attitude toward their work and complete their tasks within the allotted time but don't want to stick around for extra hours or revisit their own work after they clock out for the day (4)”.

5.1 Employee Engagement History

“In 1993, Schmidt et al. linked for the first time the concept of job satisfaction and employee engagement with definition “an employee’s involvement with, commitment to, and satisfaction with work (5)” “In their review of the literature in 2011, Shuck and Wollard identify four main sub-concepts within the term:

- “Needs satisfying” approach, in which engagement is expression of one’s preferred self in task behaviors.
- “Burnout antithesis” approach, in which energy, involvement and efficacy are presented as the opposites of established “burnout”, exhaustion, cynicism and lack of accomplishment. This can also be illustrated by how mistakes are handled within an organization where spirals of trust/mistrust manifest as explained in the book “Enfing the Blame Culture” by Peam, Mulrooney and Payne (6).”

5.2 Why Employee Engagement is important?

“Employee engagement is an integral part of how an organization develops and becoming a real driver for organizational development and success. It is linked to the strategy, purpose and meaning of organization and critical to the success of attaining high performance. It’s crucial that employee engagement is business focused, rather than about just being nice to employees. There is a vast amount of evidence that shows how high performing organizations have used effective employee engagement strategies as part of their business model (7). “

“The concept of engagement has naturally evolved from past research on high involvement, empowerment, job motivation, organizational commitment, and trust. The key factors in engagement are such as alignment of employees toward strategy; enabling employees to have the capability to engage them-selves; and creating the sense of engagement. This multi-faceted nature of employee engagement is well captured by the Employee Engagement Consortium at Kingston University. The researchers say that: ‘fundamental to the concept of employee engagement is the idea that all employees can make a contribution to the successful functioning and continuous improvement of organizational processes. Engagement is about creating opportunities for employees to connect with their colleagues, managers and the wider organization. It is about creating an environment where employees are motivated to want to connect with their work and really care about doing a good job’ (8)”.

5.3 Employee Engagement Issues

Employee engagement is a critical aspect of organizational success. Engaged employees are passionate, committed, and motivated, and they are more likely to go above and beyond to achieve organizational goals. However, many organizations struggle with employee engagement issues. Factors such as low morale, lack of trust, poor communication, ineffective leadership, insufficient training and development, and inadequate recognition and rewards can all contribute to disengagement among employees. Disengaged employees may be less productive, more likely to call in sick, and more likely to leave their jobs, which can be costly for organizations. Therefore, it is essential for organizations to identify and address employee engagement issues to create a positive and productive work environment.

Below some common employee engagement issues that companies often face:

- Lack of communication and feedback - employees feel disengaged when they're not given proper feedback on their work or when they feel like their opinions aren't being heard.
- Ineffective management - employees may feel disengaged if they don't have a good relationship with their managers or they feel like they're not being managed well.
- Unfulfilling work - if employees don't find their work meaningful or challenging, they may lose interest and engagement.

- Limited career growth opportunities - if employees feel like they have hit a dead-end in their careers, they may lose motivation and not engage fully in their work.
- Poor work-life balance - employees may feel disengaged if they have to sacrifice their personal life for work or if they feel like their workload is too heavy.

5.4 Employee Engagement & Leadership

organization's leadership is paying attention to them, they demonstrate a higher level of involvement in their work. It has been determined that two aspects of leadership that are most influential are the ability to articulate a vision and the qualities that constitute a successful mentor or manager. In the case of entrepreneurial companies, the leadership needs to be imaginative and focused on the future. Additionally, they need to involve the employees in their vision so that employee engagement may increase. It was also shown that one of the most important factors that drives employee engagement is the employees' perception that their leadership is devoted to the company. The degree to which employees are engaged in their work is influenced by quality of leader member exchanges that take place between supervisors and workers.

5.5 Employee Engagement Improvement Practices

- **Career Development**

Set a clear goal with your employees and provide them with the tools and resources to achieve them. This will create a sense of purpose and direction in their careers.

- **Overall project objective**

To get everyone invested in the project, we can arrange weekly meetings to update everyone on the status of the work and troubleshoot any issues that have arisen. The team's knowledge of the topic will increase when they discuss it among themselves.

- **Effective Management of talent**

This point plays a crucial role in engaging employees and building a productive workforce. When Manager foster an inclusive work environment, employees feel valued and appreciated for their unique perspective and backgrounds. This leads to higher employees' engagement.

- **Leadership**

Leadership plays a crucial role in creating an engaged and motivated workforce. An engaged employee is committed to their work, has a sense of ownership, and feels valued by their organization. The leadership needs to focusing on the communication, empowerment, recognition, development, and culture which will result in employees who're committed, motivated, and productive.

- **Clarity of company values, policy and practices**

Clarity in company values, policies, and practices can lead to higher employee engagement, as employees are more motivated to work for an organization that has clear values, policies, and practices that align with their own values and beliefs. This can lead to better job satisfaction, higher productivity, and lower turnover.



- **Fair treatment**

Ensuring that all employees have equal access to opportunities for professional development and career progression additionally, egalitarian compensation system have an effect on the level of engagement that employees have with the company.

- **Performance appraisal**

The organization that uses an appropriate evaluation technique that is known to be unbiased and transparent typically displays a greater degree of employee engagement. Engagement levels are also enhanced when the supervisor communicates with the employee regarding job responsibilities. As a result, Saudi Aramco encourages the supervisor to arrange three meetings with the employees during the year to discuss career development and employee performance. Moreover, engagement levels are increased when the supervisor has well-organized communication with the employee.

- **Talent recognition**

Recognizing employees' efforts has a significant impact on engagement since it reinforces the employee's sense of worth to the company.

- **Communication**

The employees' level of comprehension of the company's strategies will improve as a result of effective communication with the employees, which will also have an effect on the connection between the supervisor and the employees as well as between the employees and their coworkers. As a direct consequence of this, employee engagement will increase.

- **Productivity**

The productivity of employees is affected by several factors, individual the work environment, the relationship between the employer and employee. Engaged employees' put in a lot of effort consistently in order to accomplish the goals that are necessary for the jobs and responsibilities they have. In addition to this, they take on additional responsibilities outside the scope of their roles in order to free up resources while simultaneously achieving their objectives and effectively carry out their duties.

5.6 Role of HRM in Employee Engagement

The role of HRM is to plan how to increase employees' engagement in the company by developing and administering new practices and strategies. It's that part of management that improves the work environment, peers' relationships, and employees' affiliation.

5.7 The Impact of Employee Engagement on project performance

To be able to accomplish their jobs to the best of their abilities, workers need to believe that they have the mental, emotional, and physical resources necessary for success. In addition to this, a business must be aware of how to project and communicate the firm's past achievements to its workforce. Therefore, employees are able to tie their individual performances to successes and understand how their performance has a direct impact on the performance of the company as a whole. In addition, employees are able to relate their individual achievements to the success of the business. This leads to increased involvement on the part of the employees. A high level of engagement results in increased financial performance, increased productivity, increased levels of customer satisfaction, and decreased levels of employee turnover.

6. IMPLEMENTATION OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES IN SAUDI ARAMCO PROJECT MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION

Several tools are available and can be used to evaluate employee engagement, including the following:

- Surveys
- Focus Group

“In addition to surveys and focus groups other information collection and validation methods might include:

- More informal style of sessions such as lunch and learn with senior managers giving tentative or initial findings.
- Using facilitated team discussions with external facilitator.

- Having “follow up” interviews from a mixed sample taken at random within the organization.
- On line discussion forums and groups.

All these methods provide data and feedback on progress, they also serve to highlight any continued area of concern and where gaps or issues might be emerging (9).”

Saudi Aramco has implemented several initiatives aimed at increasing employee engagement, including the 2022 Engagement Survey, which covered the following areas:

- **Sustainable Engagement**

Saudi Aramco aimed to measure employees' goals by setting a SMART goal: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Also, several surveys are conducted to measure level of engagement in order to solve issues immediately

- **Development**

The development of Saudi Aramco's workforce is regarded as one of the company's top priorities. As a result, the management at Saudi Aramco works to provide its employees with the tools they need to effectively manage their own careers, as well as opportunities for employees to receive training from organizations outside of Saudi Aramco.

- **Performance Management**

Performance management and employee engagement go hand in hand. A well-executed performance management process fosters engagement by aligning individual goals with organizational objectives, encouraging continuous feedback, providing development opportunities, recognizing achievements, empowering employees, and supporting work-life balance. When employees are engaged, they are more committed, productive, and motivated to contribute to the organization's success.

- **Efficiency**

Engaged employees who feel motivated, have clarity in their roles and goals, and are supported by efficient processes and systems are more likely to deliver high levels of productivity and contribute to organizational efficiency. Conversely, a focus on efficiency and continuous improvement can enhance employee engagement by removing obstacles, empowering employees, and promoting collaboration and communication. By prioritizing both elements, organizations can create a positive cycle of engagement and efficiency that drives overall success.

- **Fairness**

Saudi Aramco committed to the fair treatment of all employees and treated the employee's with respect regardless of the background; therefore, the company set a clear policy and plan to save employees and company right.

- **Recognition**

To maximize the impact of recognition on employee engagement, it's important to ensure that recognition is timely, specific, and tailored to individual preferences. Recognition should be aligned with organizational values and goals, and it can take various forms such as verbal praise, written appreciation, awards, promotions, or opportunities for professional growth.

- **Trust**

To build and maintain trust within an organization, it is important to promote transparency, honesty, and consistency in communication. Leaders should lead by example, demonstrate integrity, and follow through on their commitments. Creating opportunities for team-building, collaboration, and relationship-building also strengthens trust. Regular feedback, recognition, and the provision of resources and support further enhance trust levels.

- **Sustainability**

“a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its value. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization. The organization must work to develop and nurture engagement, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee. (10)”

7. TEAM AND PROJECT PERFORMANCE

“Ability, motivation, and opportunity (AMO) this factors can be used for project performance. “The HRM literature proposes that performance is an outcome of three factors—ability (A), motivation (M), and opportunity (O)—which together form the AMO framework (Appelbaum et al., 2000; Blumberg & Pringle, 1982; Boxall, 2003). Ability, which refers to the capacity to perform, is closely connected to knowledge base and skills. Motivation includes attitudinal variables and refers to an individual’s willingness to perform. Opportunity reflects the means through which abilities and motivation can be converted into outcomes (Jiang et al., 2013). Several empirical studies have adopted and validated this conceptual framework (Batt, 2002; Liao et al., 2009; Subramony, 2009). For instance, Bailey et al. (2001) found that high performance work systems (HPWS), which are characterized by incentives to encourage employee participation and human resource practices that ensure a skilled workforce and opportunities to participate in decisions, positively affect earnings in several industries. (11)”



In order to do activities that include sequential or reciprocal interdependencies, team members must possess the appropriate expertise. In most cases, motivation and organizational backing won't be enough to make up for a lack of these skills. Instead, progress on the project as a whole will be negatively impacted by delays or subpar work on individual tasks. The level of the team's motivation is another thing we anticipate will have a significant role that won't be cancelled out by the other two. A highly motivated team demonstrates behaviors like trusting one another and working together for the greater good. If team members aren't highly motivated, it could be because they lack trust in one another or aren't fully devoted to the project's aims. This could lead to interpersonal tensions and subpar results.

8. EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES IN D&TPD

D&TPD is committed to continuing its efforts to enhance the tools it uses to engage its workforce as part of its management goal. The management gathered the chief position holders for a meeting examine the present performance of the company as well as measures to enhance the overall atmosphere of the workplace. Based on meetings held with CPH, D&TPD devised an action plan and requested each organization to design an appropriate action plan pf their own. This was done to focus on weak areas and strengthen these areas in order to attain our aim, which is make our workplace more productive, positive, and supportive.

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